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## GROVER CLEVELAND.

BY THE EDITOR.

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IN contrast with nearly all the American public men of his time was Grover Cleveland; indeed, it is the exact truth that, in his official conduct, in his public utterances, in his career, he presented to the country its present standard of excellence for the measurement of republican statesmanship,—a standard of which all our active public men fall short, and to which hardly any of them seek to attain.

Great Presidents have been very few; the reasons for this are many, and some of them are obvious. The President of the United States has more power than the English monarch; and, in times when vigorous and quick action is needed, he has more than the British Prime Minister. But the American Executive cannot manifest greatness unless the times and their circumstances require unusual action. It does not follow that a man who, in his age, may be accounted great is recognized necessarily, if he be chosen to the office, to be a great President. The times may not permit; the opportunity may not present itself; the conditions of the country may be so satisfying, so conducive to general contentment that a great man may only manifest his greatness by a wise inactivity. A foolish man in such a place at such a time would disturb the peace and the happiness of the country, because his emotions would lead him to think that he must vindicate his right to supremacy by doing something. Now, to do something merely for the sake of action—to do something when repose is essential—is not to vindicate a right to supremacy, but to demonstrate the gift of inferiority. The still-sitting soul is sublime; but the whirling and whirring fancy is ludicrous weakness, so long as it is not injurious.

The great Presidents whom we have happily possessed may

be easily counted. George Washington was great as a man and a soldier and a statesman. We owe to him, far above all other men, the independence of the country and the Union of the States. Thomas Jefferson was great as political philosopher and as statesman. We owe to him our early teachings of the dignity and worth of manhood, and of the deep significance of the essential principles of individual liberty; and we owe to him our Western boundaries. Abraham Lincoln was a great President. He saved the Union, partly by his splendid patience in dealing with its open enemies, his faith in his cause, and in the people, both Northern and Southern, and partly by his self-sacrificing and very intelligent resistance to the radicals of his own party. Had he lived, the Republic would have been better off to-day than it is likely to be for many years to come. Grover Cleveland is also to be counted a great President, great especially in character. The alternative was more than once presented to him to prefer his party or to defend and protect the general welfare, and he did what is done by all men who are worthy of political leadership; he accepted the issue as it was presented to him, and chose his part without considering his own fortunes; he did what was best for the country and what would, therefore, have been best for his party also if the party had been endowed with the wisdom to accept his reasoned conclusions.

Mr. Cleveland was a great Executive. He asserted and maintained the independence and the dignity of the Presidency against the attacks of the Senate, the enmity of disappointed politicians, the wiles of his own fellow partisans. He enforced the law without prejudice and without favor. He exercised power to maintain Federal rights, and he protected the rights of the States. Without an army and without a competent navy he gained the national purpose against the will of a Power which had successfully declined to yield to the prayers of many administrations before his.

It was a great political career; it is one more testimony to what is really a maxim of the art of government; no man can be a successful statesman who, at any critical moment, will consider the exigencies of his party to the detriment of the public interests. It may be said that his party's judgment of what is best for the public interests is more likely to be correct than his own. This probably will always be untrue; for the party's

view, especially in emergencies arising from new conditions, will necessarily be a compromise. While it is a common and, on the whole, a true saying that free government, such as our own and such as England's, is government by compromise, there come times when compromise is inevitably wrong, even immoral, and then the public good depends upon the firm conscience and the high courage of the man who will not compromise. The man who then consults his party may be a clever politician whose cleverness may serve him throughout his time; but he will not rank high among statesmen, and what fame he gains will be greatest among his contemporaries.

The first reason for recognizing Cleveland as the man who set up the present standard of excellence in American political life is that he never sought an office; that he never considered his own interests in any political action he took, or in any word he uttered; that, strong partisan as he always was, he regarded his party as an instrument for advancing the public welfare, or for defending or maintaining free government; and that he invariably took office—sometimes at what seemed to him to be a grievous personal sacrifice—for the reason that he was called upon to render service, the highest service of citizenship. The honors and trappings of office were nothing to him; perhaps they and their symbolism were the most grievous burden of his public life; the obligations and duties of office were everything to him. Public life was hard and exacting to him, as it must be to every one whose public work is beneficent.

When he was in the court-room engaged in the trial of a case, he was told that he had been nominated to be Mayor of Buffalo. He had no desire to hold the office; he had never thought that he should be called to it; he was daily becoming more and more interested in his increasing practice; but, as he said in accepting the Democratic nomination for the office, he felt he had no right to consult his own inclination when his fellow citizens called upon him to render a public service. The service, in this instance, was to aid by leading the "efforts to inaugurate a better rule in municipal affairs." The spontaneous response of the people to unselfish devotion to public duty is an answer to the critics of democracy. Cleveland's reputation as a very intelligent, very honest and very effective municipal chief magistrate was so wide and so convincing that Buffalo's Mayor was honored

throughout the country, and even in this comparatively humble office he made his name one to conjure with.

It was natural that his party should think of him as an "available" candidate for Governor. It is one of the developed facts of the history of democracy that the possession of character is the most important element of "availability." Cleveland's character induced, perhaps compelled, every nomination that he received from the politicians, and led to every one of his popular majorities; while it was his character which gave him in his retirement the great influence he possessed with the people of the country—the people of all parties and of all sections. So distinguished was his position that to question it or him, its appropriateness or his desert, would have been to create a suspicion of the soundness of the character, or of the sanity of the judgment, of the questioner. The professions made by Cleveland of high ideals of service, and his promises to subordinate personal inclinations and pure partisanship to the good of the community, sound perhaps familiar to those who are acquainted with the words and the ways of the usual politician, the words of promise and the ways of negation. Cleveland, in our expressive phrase, "made good"; it was soon learned that he never had intention to utter empty words, or to lure votes for himself by jingling the small counterfeit coin of speeches and letters of acceptance, as well as of platforms, that has now jingled so often that its meretricious tintinnabulations never penetrate beyond the portal of the public ear. He seemed a new kind of politician in those early days. His official life was on the high plane of his utterances. Many men before him had prattled about service, but he served, not grudgingly, not fitfully; he never spared himself. He was literally the servant of the people whose officer he was. It was their government that he administered, their property that he cared for, their offices that he filled, and their good that he consulted.

When his friends told him that they thought he ought to be nominated for Governor he was not patient, and some said that he was petulantly impatient, while some regarded him as rude. A good many people have thought Cleveland rude first and last, but most of the time the seeming rudeness could be traced to preoccupation. He had now become engrossed in the concerns of a city. These concerns were sadly disarranged when

he became Mayor, and in a few months he had done much to put them in order; so much had he accomplished that the corrupt leeches on the body politic were shaken off their prey, and were as angry against the Mayor as good citizens were pleased with him. He resented the attempt to take him from what had now become an absorbing occupation, but the party prevailed. It had been wise enough to seize its opportunity, and its candidate was made Governor of the State. In about two years he was again taken from an office in which he was rendering public service, and was nominated to be President of the United States.

It is one of the significant facts in Cleveland's public life that he deeply offended every plundering politician with whom he came in contact, or with whose plans and political occupations, directly or indirectly, he interfered. When he was Mayor of Buffalo he put an end to the usual easy stealing which makes city politics so tempting a field to those who seek office for the customary purpose of serving themselves and those of their friends and acquaintances who keep them in power. Cleveland had no fear of these offended persons because he had nothing to ask of them. Nor did he have the politician's fear of offending public clamor. He was a just man, and executed the law as it was written and as was its intent. So he vetoed the "Elevated Railroad Five-Cent Bill," thereby raising a windy storm of angry and menacing words which passed on, in time, into generous praise for a manly discharge of a plain duty. The Congressman who gains his poor place in public life by catering to the selfishness of his constituents encountered him after he became President. The men who sought votes through the distribution of seed to "drought-stricken" farmers at the expense of the Federal Government were startled by the President's refusal to violate the law in their behalf; the practice of raiding the Treasury for pensions in aid of those who were not entitled to them under general laws, or who were not entitled to them at all because their claims were fraudulent, was long a source of large profit to pension agents and to politicians; Cleveland made no friends of these by his many vetoes of this scandalous legislation. The party managers who desired the distribution of the public offices for the profit of parties and partisans soon found that Cleveland's devotion to the public interests was incompatible with their designs.

The public man of the United States who, like Cleveland,

administers the public law for the public welfare is not generally counted a good politician. Carl Schurz used to say that such a man was the best of politicians. What is meant here by the "good politician" is the man who can win most votes at the polls. The narrow-visioned, unimaginative, unobservant politician is wrong, and Carl Schurz was right. Sometimes the time-server is forced to recognize the truth and to nominate the man of the first rank, whom, however, sooner or later, he will have at the mercy of his petty wrath and small opinion. In the main, the politician will refuse to nominate the large man, thus denying to the country the opportunity to express its opinion of him; it remains true, nevertheless, that the public servant who devotes himself to the public good in this country will always command the public respect and affection. To fill office and to perform its functions in this way, with the self-sacrifice which this way demands, is to be a statesman. To do this consistently and persistently is to make one's career a standard of statesmanship. And this Cleveland accomplished. In his active official life every moment was the city's or the State's or the Nation's. All his thoughts and deeds were for those for whom he was trustee. He lived up to his ideal with a courage and a devotion that made him in his retirement the most influential citizen of the country. When he held office he more than once refused to sacrifice what he esteemed to be the good of the country to party harmony, to party gain or to personal advantage. He defended the country against the selfishness and greed of politicians and of other dealers in public wares. He defended, too, against the Senate, the office which had been bestowed upon him, as he defended Federal rights against the States, as he was circumspectly jealous of the rights of the States. He could not be moved, as other men, some of them good, have been, by temptations presented to his ambition, for he had no ambition to hold office or to wield power. "What can you do with such a man?" asked some one; "he doesn't want anything." The public life of Grover Cleveland was one of service, and from it grew his wonderful influence. He was the pre-eminent embodiment of these political and social truths—that from the truest service comes the noblest power, and that the power of influence is vastly greater than the power of authority.

THE EDITOR.